

Lesbos in Springtime

Lesbos is the third largest Greek Island situated in the Aegean Sea. The coast of Turkey is a few kilometres eastwards. The geographical position of Lesbos attracts migrants on their way to Turkey and beyond. The island has a varied and fascinating landscape with mountains and pinewoods in the south, rocky valleys in the centre and areas of damp meadows, wetlands and seasonal rivers running into the sea. Lesbos has some sought-after species in Rock and Kruper's Nuthatches and the internationally scarce Cinereous Bunting. The main purpose of our visit is to witness the spectacular spring migration which takes place every year. The air can be literally alive with herons, marsh terns, birds of prey, hirundines and passerines. Kaloni Salt pans will be visited on most days for shorebirds as the numbers and variety of birds change daily. This tour to Lesbos takes in the very best of birdwatching the eastern half of the Mediterranean region. Our base will be at Skala Kaloni throughout our stay.

Day 1: We take a morning flight to Athens where we have a connection to Mytilini on Lesbos. On arrival we make the short journey to Skala Kalloni, our base for the week.

Day 2: Our hotel at Skala Kaloni is situated near an area of wetlands, salt pans and olive groves, good habitats for migrant birds. Species we can expect to see in the town itself, or flying over, include White Stork, Glossy Ibis, Wood Sandpiper, Garganey, Little Owl, Eurasian Bee-eater and White-winged Terns. The East River is a major staging post for water birds. We can expect Little Bittern, Great and Little Egrets, Black-crowned Night, Squacco, Grey and Purple Herons and, with luck, Little and Spotted Crakes. Emergent riverside vegetation often harbours warblers of which Great Reed and Eurasian Reed, Sedge and Savi's can be numerous. Wetlands often have terns, most of which will be Whiskered and White-winged although there is an outside chance of Gull-billed and Caspian. Passerines include Common and Lesser Whitethroats, Olivaceous Warbler, Red-throated Pipit, Short-toed Lark, Lesser Grey, Red-backed and Woodchat Shrikes. Raptors pass overhead with some regularity and include Western Marsh and Montagu's Harriers, Eurasian Hobby, Red-footed Falcon, Short-toed Eagle and perhaps an early Eleonora's Falcon. The Gulf of Kalloni may have lingering Black-necked Grebes and Mediterranean Gulls. Later in the day we visit a site for Eurasian Scops Owls.

Dates

Saturday April 22nd - Saturday April 29th 2017

Leaders: Mark Finn

Group Size: 8

Birds: 125-145

Day 3: Today we drive westwards to Sigrí along winding roads passing through rocky mountainous country. Birds en route include Black-eared, Isabelline and Northern Wheatears, Common Nightingale and Subalpine Warbler. Ipsilou Monastery is unique in having nesting Long-legged Buzzards on its rocky escarpments. Other species, which prefer this environment, include Red-rumped Swallow, Eurasian Crag-martin, Rock Nuthatch, Rock Sparrow, Blue Rock and Rufous-tailed Rock Thrushes, Sombre Tit, Woodlark, Common Raven, Ortolan and Cinereous Buntings. A track, which meanders northwards, should produce Short-toed Eagle, Black Kite, Red-footed Falcon and Hooded Crow. Fields often have migrants including Black-headed Wagtail, Common Redstart and Whinchat. Any stand of oaks is worth scanning for Middle-spotted Woodpecker. Sigrí is a village in western Lesbos overlooking several offshore islands. Lesser Kestrel and Eurasian Jackdaws can be numerous around old buildings and ruins. Sigrí attracts many migrants with previous visits producing Common and Great Snipe, Baillon's and Spotted Crakes, Tawny and Tree



Cinereous Bunting Photo: David Boniface

Pipits, Citrine Wagtail, River and Barred Warblers, Red-breasted and Collared Flycatchers, Rufous-tailed Bush Chat and Golden Oriole. Telegraph wires attract European Bee-eaters, European Roller, Lesser Grey, Red-backed, Masked and Woodchat Shrikes.

Day 4: Today we travel north to Molivos. The cliffs and castle near Molivos hold many breeding birds. Offshore we should find Audouin's Gulls. We can expect to see Orphean and Ruppell's Warblers and Rock Nuthatch whilst raptors include Peregrine Falcon. Coastal ravines are covered in scrub attracting migrants and resident Chukars. We end the day at Kaloni salt pans where herons, egrets and shorebirds abound - Eurasian Spoonbill, Collared and, more rarely, Black-winged Pratincoles, Stone Curlew, Wood and Curlew Sandpipers, Pied Avocet, Black-winged Stilt, Little Stint, Ruff and Common Greenshank. On previous visits we have observed Black Stork, Common Crane and Great Spotted Cuckoo.

Day 5: Agiassos is our destination today. This town is situated high in the mountains below the summit of Mount Olympus. Woodland starts to dominate the area just beyond the village. This holds a range of interesting species. Familiar birds include Northern Goshawk, Common Buzzard, Common Raven, Mistle Thrush, Woodpigeon, Long-tailed Tit and Short-toed Treecreeper. On our return to Kaloni, a stop will be made at an old army camp. Kruper's Nuthatch has bred here for the last few years. With luck, we should see this highly localised bird along with Collared and Pied Flycatchers, Black-eared Wheatear and

European Serin. Derbyshire, an area similar to its namesake in England, is close by. The wetlands here attract Black Stork, Great Egret and Ruddy Shelduck.

Day 6: Today we start with a visit to the Potamia Valley, home to the highly secretive Olive Tree Warbler which prefers the overlap of oak and olive trees. Other birds we may encounter include Common Buzzard, Masked Shrike and Spotted Flycatcher. Further on, we arrive at Parakila Marsh, home to breeding Black-winged Stilts, Great Reed Warblers and other marshland birds. Marsh terns are regularly seen along with Little Crane, Common Moorhen and Common Coot. We continue west to Tavari, passing through dry rocky hillsides and damp valleys. Birds we are likely to encounter are Middle-spotted Woodpecker, European Roller and Alpine Swift. Seawatching at Tavari should reward us with passing Scopoli's and Yelkouan Shearwaters and the local race of European Shag. We make our way back through the central mountain road which will give us another chance to locate birds which are mentioned under day 4.

Day 7: Birdwatching in and around the Kaloni area or a return visit to Sigrí. At this time of the month we can expect our first Black-headed Buntings from their wintering grounds in India.

Day 8: We transfer to Mytilini airport for our connection to Athens and our flight home to the UK.

Prices

Ground Price: £1,195
 Single room: £150
 Deposit: £200
 *Air Fare: £300

This tour is fully inclusive of accommodation and meals, transport, park entrance fees and permits, guidance, tips and taxes.

Not included: drinks, insurance, and items of a personal nature.

**Please refer to our terms and conditions relating to flights*